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Combating Terrorism through Education:
The Near East and South Asian Experience

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I welcome the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the work of the U.S. Agency for International Development in Asia and the Near East on the theme of "Combating Terrorism through Education: The Near East and South Asian Experience." We appreciate the importance of education as a force for peace and progress, and welcome this opportunity to share the experiences of our ongoing education programs in these two critical sub-regions.

USAID works in 28 countries in Asia and the Near East – from Morocco to the Philippines and as far north as Mongolia. The region is home to 64 percent of the world's population and two-thirds of the world's poor. Across the region, there are many religious and cultural traditions. Some of the countries working to address terrorist threats have Muslim majorities. Some do not such as Nepal and Sri Lanka.

Understanding and responding to the drivers of terrorism in all the countries we work in requires a good knowledge of local conditions and putting in place programs that are directly relevant to those issues. Our field missions give USAID a capacity to act effectively to make appropriate education interventions. They do so within a framework of complementary investments which support stability, openness and economic opportunity. Education alone is not "the answer" but it is absolutely critical to success.

I am proud that our many investments have shown positive results in improving access, quality and the responsiveness of national education systems. This statement outlines some of the problems we face, some of the work we have done and notes accomplishments. There is an array of responses that can and do work. Oftentimes, in concert with host countries, other donors and the private sector, good ideas can be scaled up. In many settings, the resources are not there for the kind of robust response that is required to provide national level coverage.

Given the current knowledge deficit in the Near East and South Asia regions, education is one of our highest priorities. USAID's program approach supports the *9/11 Commission Report* recommendation that "the US should reach out to young people and offer them knowledge and hope." The current education challenges in the region are: the lack of access to functioning schools, low quality and irrelevant curriculum, a large number of out-of-school youths, high illiteracy rates, particularly for females, and unemployed youth without the necessary skills to find gainful employment. We have responded to these challenges by focusing our programs on increasing equitable access to education opportunities, improving the quality and relevance of education, improving literacy and strengthening workforce skills. We are monitoring the impact our programs - we have enrolled over 170,000 (56% girls) accelerated learning students in Afghanistan and 69,214 students are enrolled in literacy courses in Pakistan. We have printed and distributed 27 million textbooks in Afghanistan. We have recognized the important role of information technology in changing the way education is delivered and incorporated in our programs. We are encouraging the use of public-private partnerships and are collaborating closely with MEPI, Peace Corps, and other agencies to leverage our impact and to avoid duplication.

Since 2001, USAID's education portfolio in the Near East and South Asian region has dramatically expanded from 1 to 13 programs. The budget for education in the following 13 countries rose from $99.5 million in FY 2002 to nearly $274.5 million in FY 2004: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Egypt, India, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, West Bank/Gaza, and Yemen. Four of the USAID Missions housing these programs– Afghanistan,

Pakistan, Yemen and Iraq – opened recently. We established them to handle priorities arising out of U.S. foreign policy goals and ongoing development challenges in the region.

As noted in the 9/11 Commission Report, the Muslim world has fallen behind the West politically and economically for the past three centuries. Governments find it challenging to meet the population's daily needs, including education. This has created an environment where young Muslims lack the tools and opportunities to effect change in intolerant political regimes. This has also created an environment where disaffected groups can be more easily turned against elements of Western culture and institutions. Creating an environment of opportunity, tolerance, and greater openness to women and other marginalized groups must come from within Muslim societies themselves. The U.S. can help support the development of a more tolerant and open society by supporting quality education opportunities.

In response to the weakness of many national education systems, alternative schools have emerged, such as madrassahs, a small proportion of which spawn extremism. USAID, regional experts and researchers agree that providing access to quality education for children and out-of-school youth of vulnerable populations is one deterrent to radical or fundamentalist ideology which may lead to support for or participation in acts of terrorism. As stated in the National Strategy for Combating Terrorism, education programs diminish the underlying conditions that terrorists seek to exploit, particularly in rural, isolated areas. Access to a quality and relevant education provides children and youth with independent and critical thinking skills, leadership and life skills, and exposure to democratic values.

Although the global commitment to "Education for All" have led to increased enrollments and general improvements in the quality of life, educational quality, and increased learning opportunities in the Near East and South Asia, many countries in the region continue to struggle to meet the population's education needs.

Current Education Challenges

Current education challenges in the regions include a lack of access to functioning schools, a large number of out-of-school youth, high absenteeism and drop out rates, low transition rates from primary to secondary school, and high illiteracy rates.

High illiteracy rates, especially for women, are a critical problem facing the region. Key countries such as Iraq, Yemen, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Egypt and Morocco have 40-60% illiteracy rates and illiterate populations larger than 10 million. In the Arab states alone, women account for nearly two-thirds of the illiterate population.

Another critical gender concern has to do with large numbers of disaffected youth, mainly boys, who may come to form the primary social base for radical Islamist movements. Without immediate alternatives, the current breakdown of conventional institutions of family, schools and community (compounded by increasing urbanization and bleak employment prospects) will continue to foster youth alienation, a sense of fatalism and lack of dignity. Unemployed and disenfranchised youth form a restive pool of recruits for extremist groups.

Compounding this problem is the curriculum, which is often outdated and irrelevant to socio-economic needs. Poorly qualified and trained teachers and school administrators are recurring problems. The lack of reliable systems to assess and monitor education imposes another obstacle to solving the problems. Finally, resources for education support fall short of the need.

The Asia and Near East region has experienced a drastic demographic shift and now houses the largest generation of youth ever – 368 million young people (age 15-24) in the 19 countries where USAID has a presence. The youth bulge puts enormous pressure on governments with limited capacity and resources to provide education and employment opportunities. The quality of education is low and too many students leave school without the skills and knowledge needed to find gainful employment.

The following section presents USAID's strategy for helping the nations in the Near East and South Asia overcome their education challenges. Driving this strategy is the recognized need to help nations in the region open access to information, create learning environments that encourage critical thinking skills and democratic practices, and provide education that will lead to gainful employment. Target populations include girls, women and disenfranchised youth.

USAID's Education Strategy

To prevail over these challenges, USAID's strategy for education programs is to provide learners the opportunity to gain the general skills and knowledge needed to function effectively in all aspects of life. This is done through programs that focus on:

1. *Increasing equitable access to education opportunities:* Targeting groups that have been marginalized in the education system, such as out-of-school youth, girls and disabled children, and those who have been impacted by conflict or disaster is of primary importance for ensuring equitable access to learning opportunities and the continuation of skills development. In post-conflict and post-disaster situations, transitioning children and youth into learning environments as soon as possible to normalize their lives is a priority.
2. *Improving the quality of education and providing more relevant education opportunities:* Improving the quality and relevance of education is a pivotal goal in that it encourages children to attend and to stay in school. It also offers the additional benefits of workforce development. This is particularly important in countries that lack relevant education materials, qualified teachers, and accountability for student learning in the school system.
3. *Improving literacy and strengthening workforce skills:* Education programs that improve literacy rates, develop curriculum, human capacities and livelihood skills, and aim to link skill development with employment opportunities; particularly in areas with high youth unemployment are another priority for the region.

Increasing Access to Quality Education: Achieving Results

In order to respond to the multifaceted educational challenges confronting the region, USAID supports a variety of education programs which include both formal and non-formal education efforts. Support for improving the formal basic education system spanning pre-primary to secondary school and which also encompasses literacy and training programs, are the primary focus of USAID's support. Increasingly, school-based efforts linked to employment, and higher education and university programs are also critical components of our overall approach to provide technical skills and expand cultural understanding in the region.

To increase access to education opportunities, particularly for vulnerable populations, USAID supports scholarship programs, non-formal education activities, and school construction and rehabilitation. For example, in Pakistan, more than 2,873 literacy centers have opened and in a project co-funded by the Japanese, 130 schools are in the process of being rehabilitated to improve school access for children in Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and Frontier Regions (FR) which are remote and border Afghanistan. In Iraq we have rehabilitated over 2,400 schools. In Yemen we are working with the government on school construction and renovation, equipment and supplies for teachers and children and teacher training in remote areas. These have been promising strategies for attracting out-of-school youth to classrooms.

In key post-conflict programs, there is demonstrated success in school enrollments; for example, over 170,000 students (56% girls) are enrolled in accelerated learning classes in Afghanistan. These kinds of programs are highly-visible and well-received as they flexibly address immediate needs, and provide a full primary school cycle in three years. They also target those who have been historically neglected by the primary school system. In Pakistan and Yemen, helping to provide improved schooling systems in the most isolated communities and involving community members in the rehabilitation and management of schools have been successful.

In Afghanistan, 10,000 students, largely out of school children and youth, will be trained in sustainable literacy, numeracy and life skills through the *Afghan Literacy Initiative & Community Empowerment Program*. The programs often combine literacy skills with relevant labor market needs.

Teacher training is one key area for quality improvement. USAID education programs work with teachers to provide both in-service and pre-service training that modernizes teaching methods so that they impart critical thinking and democratic values. Training often integrates content with introducing more active learning and child-centered methods. Over 15,000 teachers in Pakistan have received this type of training, as well as 33,000 teachers in Iraq. We have also printed and distributed 27 million primary and secondary textbooks in Afghanistan, and 8.7 million revised math and science books in Iraq. Finally, radio-based teacher training in Afghanistan has been received positively by teachers in 17 provinces.

Integral to the success of an education programs is to make quality improvements and increase the relevance of the educational content to socio-economic realities. In Jordan USAID is enhancing the curriculum for a new Management and Information Stream track in secondary school to prepare youth for the workforce.

Preparing learners at an early age for education is important. USAID support will enable innovative "Sesame Street" series in Bangladesh and Egypt to reach large audiences in quest of this goal. As many as 4 million pre-school age children will watch *Sisimpur* in Bangladesh, which premiered on April 15. *Alam Simsim* reaches 86% of rural Egyptian children and 45% of their mothers. Program themes include learning to be tolerant, practicing good hygiene and getting a head start in school. Furthermore, early childhood development programs increase parent involvement in the child's education and school involvement. In Jordan, underprivileged families now have access to kindergartens, and in Pakistan 47,500 children and their parents have benefited from an early childhood project in the FATA district.

Quality is also improved by strengthening involvement of the local communities in their schools (ex. training community school management committees) and making parents and students more responsible for their education (ex. developing school improvement plans). School management is improved at the local level, and experiences in various regions have influenced the way host country decision-makers view solutions for the education issues. Such initiatives are underway in Bangladesh, Pakistan, Egypt, Morocco, and Yemen. Also, in Jordan, merging Information Technology and curriculum reform has been successful. This program has also brought private sector involvement into the area of curricula reform so that it better provides students with an education that links to market demands and needs.

As mentioned earlier, the growing population of uneducated, unemployed youth is severely straining government efforts in all countries to provide adequate education and employment opportunities. USAID recognizes the importance of linking access to quality education to the 21st century workforce demands. In countries such as Pakistan, India, Jordan, Egypt and Morocco, USAID is linking education to the real needs of the job market, by giving students the adaptable and portable skills needed to confront the changing workplace, especially information and communication technology (ICT) training. Jordan is developing e-Learning curriculum modules and upgrading teachers' skills in support of teaching and learning to improve the transition of graduates from school to a work career.

USAID fosters cultural understanding, openness, tolerance and critical thinking with education exchange programs and scholarships. In Egypt, Jordan, and Lebanon, providing scholarship support to students from disadvantaged social and economic backgrounds to enroll in American education institutions have been successful. By the mid-1990s, more than 3,000 Jordanian students had won USAID scholarships to study at U.S. universities and the American University in Beirut. Many of them are leaders today. Five of Jordan's Cabinet ministers in 1987 and three ministers in the 2002 Cabinet had studied under these scholarships.

Furthermore, in-country post-secondary education programs support institutions to meet international standards and educate young people and academic professionals so that they can participate in the global economy. We support linkages between American Universities and universities. These range from university linkage partnerships, such as the five US-Iraqi higher education partnerships currently underway, to supporting the establishment of the American University of Afghanistan, a private, independent university.

Finally, programs that model best practices in education on a small scale in order to demonstrate the positive effects of change has also proven successful. Pilot programs mobilize support from the public and from within the ranks of the local and national government officials who are charged with administering and delivering education services. Egypt's New School Program in Upper Egypt was a pilot that proved effective in increasing girls' enrollment. The lessons learnt are being used to "scale up" models of quality primary education with an emphasis on girls and learner-centered teaching methodologies. The models will be applied nationally through the new USAID-supported Education Reform Program. These positive experiences tend to galvanize support for broader change and have the potential to impact the educational system beyond the local environments in which the projects operate.

Measuring the Impact of Our Programs

Despite the growing security challenges, our education programs have brought about substantial and measurable results. USAID measures program impact and success in a variety of ways, commensurate with its diverse portfolio.

One validation of our success happens when we see many of our "models" adopted and brought to scale by host countries, relying on local, other donor and private sector resources. Unfortunately, the capacity to do that across the region is constrained. Our recent education initiative has increased the US commitment to education but much more needs to be done.

At the project level, USAID measures the impact of providing education and training opportunities to out of school

youth and vulnerable populations through student enrollment. Access and equity measurements include the number of students completing primary and secondary school, and increases in the percentage of girls and women enrolled in USAID-funded schools, literacy, and life skills classes. Using baseline data as the starting point, gender disaggregated enrollment numbers in USAID schools are tracked on a quarterly basis by the implementing partners on the ground. USAID has enrolled over 170,000 students (56% girls) in our accelerated learning program in Afghanistan.

Many of our programs are aimed at non-formal education programs aimed at improving literacy, especially for women, and training opportunities for out-of-school youth. USAID gauges enrollment increases and differentiates between students participating in programs as opposed to completing the required courses. In Pakistan, 69,214 students are enrolled in USAID funded literacy courses and 17,850 have graduated from USAID's literacy centers. This process enables us to gauge not only enrollment increases and completion rates, but also dropout and repetition rates.

Different measures are used to gauge non-traditional programs; success in measuring educational television programs is gauged by viewership: a 2003 study in Egypt concluded that Sesame Street (Alam Simsim) reaches 86% of rural Egyptian children under 8 years of age and 45% of their mothers. In Bangladesh, where Sisimpur aired on April 15th, viewership will be regularly monitored and reported.

In response to the poor quality of educational facilities and the need to provide quality alternatives to radical madrassahs, USAID tracks numbers of schools constructed and rehabilitated, and nature of the effort. This process differentiates between USAID's work in building stand-alone schools as opposed to rehabilitating a single classroom in any given school. In Egypt, for example, since 1975, USAID has tracked the construction of more than 2,000 new schools and 4,000 classrooms; in Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Area (FATA), USAID will be tracking new school construction, the surveys and designs for 112 of which have been completed. In addition to infrastructure, USAID also provides students with textbooks and learning materials to increase retention and enrollment. USAID tracks both the production and dissemination of materials to ensure that numbers of textbooks delivered are commensurate with numbers printed; in Afghanistan we have thus far printed and distributed 27 million textbooks.

USAID's teacher training and curriculum development programs are aimed at promoting tolerance, building democratic values and fostering critical thinking in students and teachers. Measurements of educational quality include indicators of teacher quality, system efficiency, and learner achievements. Learner achievement can be measured by the number of basic education students who acquire critical thinking and problem-solving skills by administering pre- and post-achievement tests. In Pakistan, teaching methodologies improved by 97% (based on classroom observation by experts), and student attendance is 10% higher, on average, in participating schools. Monitoring data suggest that teachers are using materials effectively 95% of the time.

USAID tracks enrollment and successful completion of teachers in training classes in both in-service and pre-service programs. In innovative teacher training programs, such as the radio-based teacher training program for Afghanistan primary school teachers, teacher training is tracked by numbers of teachers enrolled in the class; currently 10,000 primary school teachers have enrolled for this radio based teacher training. USAID measures and tracks progress in this area through enrollment and completion numbers and qualitative assessments that include interviews, questionnaires, and classroom observation.

In Morocco indicators such as percent of target beneficiaries employed post intervention, percent of graduates with portable and adaptable skills, and replication of school-to-work modules in areas beyond the immediate target are used to monitor learning improvements.

Finally, another indicator of impact is the adoption by Ministries of Education of USAID-supported efforts for countrywide expansion. This has happened in Jordan with early childhood education programs, and in Egypt with modeling quality schools including using learner centered teaching.

By supporting public participation in education through NGO development and community-elected trustee boards, USAID's education programs encourage democratic activities. To measure the impact of these programs, USAID tracks community satisfaction with the performance of USAID-supported community-based organizations and the number of decisions made and implemented at the community level.

By improving the quality of education, and making it more accessible and relevant to the workforce, USAID's education interventions improve the employability of youth, lay an important foundation of support for economic growth and development of democratic institutions, and ensure a more equitable distribution of education.

Adjusting Education Programs

USAID has adjusted its education strategies to create a healthier learning environment for children, youth and adults in the Near East and South Asia on the basis of feedback from the most successful programs in the region.

USAID recognizes that Information Technology (IT) is one way to change the way that students learn and teachers teach. There are now more efforts to link IT to schools and curriculum. Internet access is limited in the Arabic speaking world, resulting in a knowledge gap that negatively impacts both economic and political development, making Arab populations less competitive in the world economy. By providing future leaders and adults with increased access to the Internet, these students are exposed to many more ideas and increases cultural understanding. Teachers can use IT in the classroom to encourage critical thought and democratic values. Technology also helps to reach larger audiences, as in the radio-based training for teachers in Afghanistan and Sesame Street episodes in Egypt and Bangladesh.

ANE has also learned that public-private partnerships are important to support education programs. USAID/ANE has committed $10 million to a regional Education and Employment Alliance which involves Egypt, Morocco, Pakistan, India, Indonesia and Philippines to increase private sector participation in education. Activities mainly include working with local and multinational organization to provide resources to upgrade schools and provide technology inputs for schools. These activities aim to give children and youth a higher quality basic education and an education that leads to livelihood skills and gainful employment. As of January 2005, outreach activities continue with multinational companies, including Cisco, GE, Intel, Lucent, Microsoft, Nokia, Pearson, Unocal, and First Data Western Union.

USAID has also been more directly working with host governments to make comprehensive reforms to education systems. Holistic changes have a broader impact in that they reach all levels from the students and parents, to administrators at the local and national levels. This systemic approach for improving education with Ministries of Education will lead to long-term improvements that can be sustained.

Finally, USAID continues to refine programs to reach the most vulnerable populations. Those who have been marginalized from the education systems are primary targets for our programs. In the Near East and South Asia regions, illiterate adults, out-of-school youth, and marginalized children are the most vulnerable to the messages of terrorists. For this reason, USAID works closely with the State Department on the Broader Middle East and North Africa initiative.

Collaborating with MEPI

Under the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI), managed by the State Department, USAID administers a variety of activities across the MEPI pillar areas of economic reform, political reform, education reform, and women's empowerment. The MEPI education pillar supports education systems that enable all people, especially girls, to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in today's economy and improve the quality of their lives and that of their families. MEPI and USAID have similar education goals: Access, Quality, and Skills Development which makes coordination between USAID and MEPI programs both essential, and synergistic.

USAID has collaborated with MEPI in a variety of projects to jointly fund programs to establish U.S.-Middle East university partnerships to strengthen programs in such areas as education, business/economics, journalism, and information and communications technology.

In FY 2003, USAID/Egypt completed the integration of the MEPI strategy into a new program design that was launched in 2004 to support the Egypt's Governments' education reform initiatives. USAID also began implementing its first MEPI book project by distributing supplementary reading materials to 3000 classrooms in Alexandria.

In Jordan, MEPI is funding e-Learning modules for the English as a Second Language and Civics for the Jordan Education Initiative and the USAID mission monitors and manages some or this entire program in country.

In Morocco, MEPI's literacy initiatives complement current USAID efforts to improve the quality of schools. The literacy program consists of two parts: a ten-month basic literacy training program for 2000 women that also includes health and nutrition literacy; and a six-month "post" literacy training program for a selected number of participants (approximately 80), that teaches simple business skills as a basis for income generation activities. The program also includes assistance and coaching for the creation and initial management of small businesses.

In Yemen, USAID works closely with MEPI and the Public Diplomacy Office of the U.S. Embassy to design and implement an in Internet communication and collaborative learning network for 20 high schools through Yemen with each other and with schools in the U.S.

With the development of a new education strategy, the USAID education team ensured that its new strategy aligned with MEPI pillars. Additionally, the education team participates in strategy and planning meetings and provides technical comments and assistance for the review of MEPI education proposals.

USAID is also working with the MEPI office to support key tenets of the G8 partnership with countries of the Broader Middle East and North Africa (BMENA). Several initiatives have developed under this partnership, one of which is on improving literacy in the region. USAID is providing policy and programmatic direction for this BMENA literacy initiative and coordinating its efforts directly with MEPI and the US Department of Education.

In conclusion, I would like to reassure the Committee that education will continue to be a high priority in the region. While our current education approach responds to the overall goal of moderating radical intolerance and anti-Western ideologies, we also recognize that education needs to be complemented by a multi-sectoral strategy that fosters socio-political stability and economic growth. To build upon our current successes and take our existing programs to scale, we have launched a public-private partnership initiative focusing on creating training opportunities for youth employment in the workforce. While we will continue to monitor developments to ensure that we are ahead of the curve in addressing emerging issues, we will not rest on the laurels of our successes - it is far too important to the well being of our nation.